

Christine Joyce

From: Janet K Adachi [jkajeg@msn.com]
Sent: Sunday, December 15, 2013 5:58 PM
To: Board of Selectmen; Christine Joyce
Subject: FW: Meeting re MMRHS w/ Reps Atkins and Peisch
Attachments: MMRHS Issues & Solutions 2013.docx; ATT00001.htm

FYI--the author of the attached memo is Carmin Reiss, Concord BOS.

Christine, would you add to the Extra Information folder for the 12/16 BOS meeting packet? Thanks.

Janet K. Adachi
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From: "Carmin Reiss" <creiss@concordma.gov>
Subject: Meeting re MMRHS w/ Reps Atkins and Peisch
Date: December 13, 2013 8:43:32 AM EST
To: <Timhult@aol.com>, "Janet K Adachi" <jkajeg@msn.com>
Cc: "Steven Ng" <sng@concordma.gov>

Tim and Janet:

I understand that you will be attending next week's meeting re: MMRHS with Reps Atkins and Peisch on behalf of your respective towns, along with your MMRHS School Committee reps. Selectman Steve Ng will attend on behalf of Concord. Our MMRHS SC rep has a conflict and cannot participate. I am attaching a memo which outlines our thinking about MMRHS issues. Carrie Flood, our MMRHS SC rep, has forwarded the same memo to your SC reps. If either of you would like to talk before the meeting takes place, please let Steve Ng or me know.

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Minuteman Regional Vocational and Technical High School: Observations

December 10, 2013

Educational Value

MMRHS (as do all experiential learning vocational/technical high school programs) provides an educational model that works for students who are not well served by traditional high school education due to learning style, learning disability, social issues, or particular student interest. The majority of MMRHS graduates go on to post secondary education, including 4-year institutions and associate degree or certificate programs for which they may already have completed some of the coursework while in high school. Some students proceed directly to a trade or other employment. In the view of the MMRHS administration, as recently expressed in submissions to MSBA, the current enrollment of the school (approximately 800 students) allows for a diversity and depth of educational programming which appropriately serves students and the regional labor market; a smaller enrollment would not so allow.

Economic Value to Students

Students who graduate MMRHS with requirements for associate degree or certificate programs already completed are able to complete their additional education in less time and at lower cost than graduates of traditional high schools. Those students who graduate with employable technical experience and skills are able to enter the workforce at a living wage, free of debt from higher education. All students who succeed in the education model at MMRHS, who would not have succeeded in a traditional education model, take with them an economic benefit in a greater likelihood of success in their future livelihoods.

Workforce Value

From the 2013 Strategic Plan of a small Boston-area private college: "In the next several years, there is projected to be a mismatch between the skill set among the population and the needs of employers. The reduced role of the manufacturing sector, the increased importance of the professional service and knowledge sectors, advancements in technology, and the spread of globalization are driving this change. Employers will need workers with more education and training at the Associate's or certificate level. The region is expected to see an increased demand from industry for workers at this skill level and demand for these types of degrees and programs."

MMRHS is directly relevant to matching the skills of graduates entering the workforce with the needs of regional employers, regularly assessing and retooling

curriculum to stay relevant. MMRHS (and all experiential voc/tech high schools) contributes directly to a healthy regional economy.

History & Current Student Body Composition

The Minuteman region of sixteen communities was formed in the 1970s; MMRHS was constructed to serve a population of 800 or so students; the Minuteman region did fill MMRHS to that level with students from member communities for several years. The demographics changed; member communities increased in affluence, beliefs and aspirations with respect to education changed, and fewer families wished to send students to MMRHS. Currently, only about half of MMRHS students are from member communities. The non-member students are at MMRHS because they need and want the educational model and opportunity that MMRHS offers, because there is no location within their home districts or regional districts available where they are able to receive it and because, in most programs, there is no space available in another out-of-district regional vocational/technical high school (others in the area have waiting lists).

In-District vs. Out-of-District Educational Costs at MMRHS

According to a recent study undertaken by a Task Force appointed by the MMRHS School Committee, out-of-district tuition (at the rate then allowed by DESE, which I believe was 150% of foundation budget – DESE has just decreased the allowable rate of out-of-district tuition) is somewhat greater than the marginal cost of sending an additional student to MMRHS, but significantly less than the average cost to send a student to MMRHS. In other words, out-of-district communities pay less to send students to MMRHS than member communities pay. In addition, member communities pay a share of MMRHS capital costs, while out-of-district communities pay none.

Current problems

MMRHS has not had a major renovation since being built; it no longer serves the educational program; it has several major failing systems; it is out of compliance with numerous current building, energy and safety codes. Under the auspices of the MSBA, a Feasibility Study for renovation or replacement of the MMRHS building currently is underway. The Feasibility Study is considering two target enrollment numbers: 435 (in-district enrollment) and 800 (combined in- and out-of-district enrollment).

The sixteen member communities do not want to fund a major capital project without any contribution from the out-of district communities that send fully half of the students. *This problem is not unique to MMRHS, as other regional voc/tech high schools in the state also have significant out-of-district enrollment.* In addition,

certain communities believe that the existing formula in the Minuteman regional agreement for apportionment of capital costs is inequitable.

Downsizing the school to accommodate only in-district students would not solve the problem. In the view of MMRHS administration and many others, downsizing to an enrollment of 435 students would result in a gutting of the educational program so profound that the program would not serve the needs of either the member communities or the regional economy. In addition, the 400 or so out-of-district students would have no other place to obtain the educational model that they need. Downsizing also would not resolve the problem of perceived inequities in the regional agreement's cost apportionment formula.

Expanding the Minuteman district to include the out-of-district communities that send large numbers of students to MMRHS would solve the problem, but there are obstacles. Out-of-district communities have little incentive to join the Minuteman district because they would then have to pay for services and capital improvements that currently they receive free. They have even less incentive now that DESE has reduced out-of-district tuition. Out-of-district communities find a further disincentive to join the Minuteman district in the regional agreement provision that does not allow withdrawal of any community without a unanimous vote of all sixteen communities. State law also creates an obstacle as cities currently send a large number of the out-of-district students and only towns are permitted to join a regional vocational technical district. A change in state law would be required to permit cities to join the Minuteman district.

Potential Solutions with State Help

The MMRHS School Committee received a DESE grant to study and propose changes to the regional agreement and appointed a committee to carry out the work with the assistance of a paid consultant. A proposal for a revised regional agreement has been reviewed by DESE, will soon be brought before the MMRHS School Committee for approval, and is hoped to be ready for approval by all sixteen member communities in the spring, 2014 Town Meeting cycle. It is hoped that the revised regional agreement will be adopted, will resolve perceived funding apportionment and governance inequities (e.g., revised capital contribution formula and weighted voting) and will reduce certain disincentives for new communities to join the district (e.g., phased capital contributions; withdrawal from district permitted on something less than unanimous vote).

Senate bill 228, which would increase the MSBA construction reimbursement rate for regional voc/tech high schools with significant out-of-district enrollment, would go a long way toward a solution to current problems at MMRHS. And again, the out-of-district enrollment problem exists not just for MMRHS, but also for a number of other regional voc/tech schools.

A change in state law to allow regional voc/tech districts to assess out-of-district communities a facility fee in addition to tuition, as is currently permitted for charter schools, would be a significant contribution to a solution at MMRHS, and would help other regional voc/tech schools with out-of-district enrollments.

A return to the out-of-district tuition rate previously permitted by DESE would help to reduce the inequity of in-district communities paying a higher per student cost than out-of-district communities, create greater incentive for communities sending out-of-district students to join the district, and encourage district communities to support an MMRHS sized to accommodate its current student population.